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U.S. to Request Access to U.N. File on Waldheim

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UNITED NATIONS, N.Y., April 8 — A senior Reagan Administration official said today that the United States would request access to a secret United Nations file on former Secretary General Kurt Waldheim.

The Office of Special Investigations of the Justice Department will request the file "in the next few days," the official said. He said the request would be made under a 1978 law providing that anyone who engaged in Nazi war crimes is ineligible for a United States visa and authorizes deportation.

The United Nations will make the secret file available to officials from the Austrian and Israeli Governments on Wednesday.

Sudden interest in the Waldheim file has raised questions about why it has taken 40 years to discover, in the words of Israel's chief delegate, Benjamin Netanyahu, that Mr. Waldheim "was not fully candid about his past."

United Nations officials and officials from several interested governments and organizations insist that until a few weeks ago, when the first revelations came to light, they had no reason to disbelieve what Mr. Waldheim, a respected career diplomat now running for the Austrian presidency, had told them. He had said his military career ended in December 1941, when he re-

ceived a leg wound on the eastern front.

But documents say that he performed intelligence duties in the 1940's in a German Army command that brutally attacked Yugoslav partisans and engaged in the mass deportation of Greek Jews; that as a young man he was enrolled in two Nazi groups, and that he was awarded the Zvonimir Medal in Croatia as a member of a Nazi unit accused of killing thousands of civilians.

Most puzzling is why the Yugoslav Government, whose State War Crimes Commission, according to Yugoslav press reports, condemned Mr. Waldheim in 1947 as a wanted war criminal and called his extradition "mandatory," has not explained why it did not follow up on Mr. Waldheim's extradition order, which was sent to the United Nations War Crimes Commission in April 1948.

Yugoslav officials at the United Nations and in Washington will only refer to a public statement made on March 27 by Alexander Stanic, the Foreign Ministry spokesman, who confirmed that the "international and Yugoslav media published the content of the document which Yugoslavia sent in January 1948 to the United Nations War Crimes Commission."

There has been much speculation, but no hard answers, on why many of the documents have come to light only

now. One theory is that the Socialists in Austria, who have opposed Mr. Waldheim's candidacy, made public certain information, including the fact that Mr. Waldheim served in the Balkans, in order to discredit him.

"This is the first hard evidence and documentation," said Neil M. Sher, director of the Justice Department's investigative unit. "There was no reason for us to investigate his background."

Others say that since Mr. Waldheim was a only lieutenant, and only one of 40,000 people whose files were listed with the United Nations, he would not have had a high profile.

The disclosures about Mr. Waldheim's past have raised another question: whether as Secretary General, or earlier as the Austrian Foreign Minister, Mr. Waldheim was susceptible to pressure from the Soviet Union or other countries that might have known of his past. Mr. Waldheim has denied that he has ever been subjected to public pressure or blackmail.

Many governments and organizations say Mr. Waldheim's war record was not an issue when he successfully ran for Secretary General in 1971 and 1976 and unsuccessfully in 1981.

"No attempt was made to investigate Mr. Waldheim," said Anatoly N. Khudyakov, press spokesman for the Soviet Mission. "The Soviet Union knew nothing."